

# Djokovic and Alcaraz stay on track

Djokovic, Alcaraz close in on Olympics showdown as Zheng ends Kerber career in Paris amid sweltering conditions

● **Djokovic defeats Koepfer, reaches fourth Olympic quarter-final**

● **Alcaraz brushes aside Safiullin in straight sets**

● **Tsitsipas faces Djokovic in quarter-final rematch of 2021 French Open final**

AFP | Paris

Novak Djokovic and Carlos Alcaraz shrugged off crushing humidity on yesterday to stay on course for an Olympic gold medal showdown as Zheng Qinwen ended the career of former world number one Angelique Kerber.

Djokovic, seeking a first Olympic title at Roland Garros to add to his record-breaking collection, defeated German left-hander Dominik Koepfer 7-5, 6-3, becoming the first man to reach four singles quarter-finals at the Games.

Alcaraz brushed aside Roman Safiullin, the Russian playing in Paris as a neutral, 6-4, 6-2.

In the women's singles, Zheng

defeated Kerber 6-7 (4/7), 6-4, 7-6 (8/6) to become only the second Chinese player to reach an Olympic singles semi-final.

The 37-year-old Djokovic has only ever collected a bronze at the Olympics, at Beijing 16 years ago, but he was rarely troubled by his 70th-ranked opponent.

"I'm soaking wet, honestly," said Djokovic, who has won three of his 24 Grand Slam crowns on Paris's famous red clay.

"It's a very, very humid day as it was yesterday. But you have to accept and embrace the conditions and try to make the best out of it."

Djokovic,

who had breezed past old rival Rafael Nadal in the second round, goes on to face 11th-ranked Stefanos Tsitsipas. Djokovic boasts an 11-2 head-to-

head record over Tsitsipas, including a victory from two sets down in the 2021 French Open final.

**'Erased it'**  
"I've erased it," said Tsitsipas when asked to recall that heart-breaking defeat.

"I can see he's motivated for this Olympics but I want to get out on the court and show that I'm a worthy player on the clay courts."

Despite his confidence, Tsitsipas has not defeated Djokovic for almost five years, with the world number two having claimed the last 10 meetings.

French Open and Wimbledon champion Alcaraz has also yet to drop a set in Paris and breezed past 66th-ranked Safiullin in 90 minutes.

Alcaraz broke serve four times and wrapped up victory with his fifth ace of the contest.

"I am really happy with the way I managed everything during the match. The conditions were really tough with the heat and it was really humid," said Al-

Novak Djokovic



**Djokovic, still wearing strapping on his right knee after June surgery, is hunting for his first trophy in 2024 and considers representing Serbia at the Olympics the "greatest honour"**

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**I'm soaking wet, honestly. It's a very, very humid day as it was yesterday. I just hope it rains so it cools down the temperature a bit and the air. But it is what it is. You have to kind of accept and embrace the conditions and it's the same for you and your opponents so you have to try to make the best out of it**

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

caraz.

Up next for Alcaraz is Tommy Paul, the American he defeated in the Wimbledon quarter-finals.

Paul made the last eight by seeing off Corentin Moutet, whose defeat ended all French interest in the five Olympic tennis events.

Australian Open runner-up Zheng became the first Chinese woman since Li Na in 2008 to reach the singles semi-finals.

Her three-hour victory, in which she unleashed 64 winners, sent 36-year-old former world number one Kerber, a silver medallist at the 2016 Rio

Games, into retirement.

"What can I say? I gave everything," said Kerber, who has slumped to 212 in the world rankings. "I have loved playing tennis. Now I can leave in peace."

Anna Karolina Schmiedlova is the first Slovakian player to make the Olympics semi-finals since Miloslav Mecir won the men's singles title at Seoul in 1988.

The 67th-ranked Schmiedlova stunned Wimbledon champion Barbora Krejcikova in straight sets.

## Son nets twice in Spurs' preseason win in South Korea

AFP | Seoul

Homecoming hero Son Heung-min scored a brace of goals as Tottenham Hotspur defeated a K-League All Stars team 4-3 in a preseason match in Seoul yesterday.

Dejan Kulusevski opened the scoring for Spurs in the 29th minute before Son, captain of both the Premier League side and the South Korean national team, went to work.

He cut in from the left wing and found the top right corner of the net with a curling effort from the edge of the box in the 38th minute.

He then teamed up with Kulusevski in stoppage time before the break to calmly score again in the bottom corner to give Spurs a 3-0 lead.

The local team returned with



Son Heung-min in action

an entirely new lineup for the second half to replace a starting XI that had been voted in by fans.

Emerson Royal found the woodwork with a header and Stanislav Iljutcenko then put the K-League team on the board

in the 52nd minute, slotting the ball home after Spurs keeper Brandon Austin was unable to hold an initial shot by Jeong Jae-hee.

Iljutcenko got his second goal two minutes later with a diving header off a Jeong cross.

After mass substitutions by Spurs, Will Lankshear put the Premier League side two goals in front in the 66th minute, volleying home a cross by Timo Werner.

The K-League team responded in the 81st minute when Oberdan hit a first-time volley after Austin punched a corner right to the Brazilian midfielder.

Spurs hung on for the narrow win, with James Maddison striking the left post during stoppage time.

Yang Min-hyeok, the South Korean teenager signed by Spurs on Sunday, started for the Korean side but did not make much of an impression.

He is currently playing for Gangwon FC in the K-League and will join Spurs in January.

Spurs faces Bayern Munich in Seoul on Saturday.

## Azarenka happy with shoulder injury recovery in Washington win



Victoria Azarenka returns a shot to Hailey Baptiste

AFP | Washington

Two-time Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka outlasted Hailey Baptiste 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/3) on Tuesday to reach the second round of the WTA and ATP Washington Open.

The sixth seed from Belarus, coming off a shoulder injury, advanced past the hometown hero after two hours and 23 minutes into a last-16 match against China's Wang Yafan.

"I think my mindset was the key today for the victory," Azarenka said. "I knew it was going to be some ups and downs, I would have to adjust in some moments. I also know she's a very talented player. She didn't give me much of the rhythm."

Azarenka could meet compatriot and two-time reigning Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka in the quarter-finals if the world number three defeats Russia's Kamilla Rakhimova after a first-round bye.

Azarenka, like Sabalenka, withdrew from Wimbledon due to a shoulder injury.

"It was good for me to test my shoulder today," she said.

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VICTORIA AZARENKA

"It went well, so I'm pretty happy with that."

Former world-number-one Azarenka, who beat Baptiste in their only prior meeting at Chicago in 2021, said she never felt comfortable during the match.

"It was hard for me to expect a high level of tennis after having a break and coming off from injury, not really having too much time on the practice court," Azarenka said.

"But I feel like I fought really hard. In the tie-breaks, in the important moments, I really executed well and did what I wanted to do. I'm very happy with that aspect, that when it did count, I really was able to step up my level."

## North-South Korea Olympic podium selfie goes viral

AFP | Paris

Images of Olympic table tennis players from North Korea and South Korea taking a selfie together on the medal podium in Paris went viral in South Korea yesterday, hailed as a rare show of cross-border unity.

Nuclear-armed North Korea declared the South its principal enemy earlier this year and tensions between the two countries are at one of their highest points in years.

But after South Korea won bronze and North Korea silver in the mixed doubles behind China, South Korea's Lim Jonghoon took a group photo after the medal ceremony.



South Korea's Lim Jonghoon takes a selfie with his teammate and Chinese and North Korean mixed table tennis team medallists

North Korea's Ri Jong Sik and Kim Kum Yong, the South's Shin Yu-bin and the victorious Chinese team Wang Chuqin and

Sun Yingsha all beamed into Lim's phone, a South Korean-made Samsung.

"A selfie with both Koreas"

national flags and a Samsung phone," said the widely read daily JongAng Ilbo.

It was the first time North Korea had been on an Olympic podium since 2016, as they did not send athletes to the Tokyo Olympics because of the Covid pandemic.

"I congratulated them when they were introduced as Silver medallists," Lim told Korean media after the award ceremony.

South Korean broadcasters have repeatedly run videos of the selfie, with many commentators reflecting on the significance of a rare moment of unity.

"This is the true spirit of the Olympics," one commentator said.